

October 2016

## **Poliomyelitis (Polio, Infantile Paralysis)**

### **What is polio?**

Polio is a disease caused by poliovirus. The disease may affect the central nervous system. It can cause paralysis and even death.

### **Who gets polio?**

Persons who do not receive the polio vaccine are most likely to get the disease. Since polio vaccination has become widespread, cases of polio are very rare in the United States and most parts of the world. It occurs mostly in persons who bring the disease in from another country. Polio persists in some developing countries.

### **What are the symptoms of polio?**

There is a wide range of disease presentations. The vast majority of people who are infected with the poliovirus don't become sick and have mild symptoms only, such as fever, malaise, headache, nausea and vomiting. Others experience severe muscle pain and stiffness in the neck and back. In the rare but most severe cases, paralysis and even death may occur.

### **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

The time from being exposed to getting sick can range from 3-35 days. Symptoms usually appear 7-14 days after exposure for paralytic cases.

### **How is polio spread?**

Polio usually is spread from person to person primarily through the fecal-oral route. The virus is transmitted from the feces (stool) of an infected person to the mouth of another person from contaminated hands or contaminated objects. It also is spread through droplets from an infected person's throat from a sneeze or cough.

### **How long can an infected person carry polio?**

Patients are most infectious from 7-10 days before and after the onset of symptoms. Patients, however, are potentially contagious as long as the virus is present in the throat and feces. The virus persists in the throat for approximately 1 week after the onset of illness and is excreted in the feces for several weeks or, occasionally, months.

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### **What is the treatment for polio?**

There is no specific treatment for polio. Treatment involves supportive care to help relieve symptoms.

### **How can polio be prevented?**

Vaccination protects people against polio. The inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) is used currently in the United States. All children should be vaccinated starting at approximately 2 months of age. Multiple doses are required to ensure protection. Contact your physician or local health department for further information about vaccination

### **How can I learn more about polio?**

- 1) Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/polio/about/>.
- 2) Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at  
<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>.
- 3) Contact your doctor.